# SPEECH DELIVERED BY YASHWANT SINHA ON ASIAN POWERS AND GULF SECURITY – DOHA 20.3.2007

I am grateful to the State of Qatar and the UCLA Centre for Middle East Development for inviting me to participate in this conference and to speak in this session on the important topic of Asian Powers and Gulf Security. I also express my deep appreciation to the State of Qatar for the warm and generous hospitality extended to me and the delegation from India which is here to participate in this conference.

India's relations with the countries of this region go back a long time in history. This relationship is civilisational and has included various kinds of exchanges including of ideas. It was through Arab traders and travellers that the concept of zero was transmitted from India to the West. India and the Gulf region have had deep cultural relations and have influenced each other's history and culture in many ways. The relationship has mutated over time to adjust to new situations and new realities. It is today a modern, flourishing and ever expanding relationship taking into account today's reality and the possibilities of tomorrow. I would like to emphasise that while the natural resources of this region form an important part of our present relationship, it is not driven merely by oil and gas, but by history.

What sets Indo-Gulf relations apart is the natural compatibility of their respective comparative advantages. God has endowed the nations of the Gulf with abundant energy resources and India with an inexhaustible fund of talented people and all the conditions conducive to extensive food production. Synergy between the Gulf and India would thus result in ensuring food security for the former, energy security for the latter and comprehensive security for the region

The Gulf along with the Middle East region which we call West Asia is our immediate neighbour joined together with us by the Arabian Sea. The Gulf countries alone have 4.5 million Indians who live and work in the countries of this region. Of this over 1,70,000 live in Qatar and constitute the largest community among foreigners in this state. The region provides 70 per cent of India's oil and gas needs. Our non-oil trade with this region is worth over US$ 20 billion. The region has the potential of being a major investment partner of a growing and developing India. Therefore, for historical, geographical and current and future considerations India has a deep and abiding interest in the security, stability and well-being of this region, indeed of the whole of West Asia. I may also explain that security for me does not merely cover military security. It is a more comprehensive concept which includes energy, food, environment, economic growth and

development of human resources. Security also covers internal and external security, the role of the nation state as well as of non-state actors. Our Look West policy, therefore, covers trade, technology, investment, energy, manpower, human and cultural exchanges on the one hand and the security concerns of this region and its impact on India and on our bilateral relationship on the other. It is natural for us, therefore, to be concerned at the developments in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Palestine as any major upheaval in this area adversely affects India's own interests. We are also concerned at the suffering that such upheavals bring to the innocent people of this region.

India's support for the Palestinian cause is rooted in history. We believe that there can be no military solution to the Palestinian issue. It is important for both sides, therefore, to eschew violence and fully cooperate with the international community to achieve the objective of the creation of a sovereign, independent and viable state of Palestine within a reasonable time frame living in peace with Israel with both countries having secure and recognised borders. India has supported the Quartet Roadmap, the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Plan of 2002. We hope that the Middle East Peace Process would bring lasting peace to the region

and address the Final Status Issues on all tracks of the Peace Process including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

India has had a deep and abiding relationship with the people of Iraq. We are greatly pained at the suffering the Iraqi people have undergone for the past many years. I express our deep sense of sorrow at the continued loss of innocent lives in Iraq almost on a daily basis. India would like to see a stable, peaceful, prosperous, united and democratic Iraq. We were against a military solution from the beginning of this crisis. Subsequent developments have confirmed our worst apprehensions. The solution to the Iraqi imbroglio must be found by the international community through the United Nations with the help of the Iraqi people without any further loss of time or of human lives. All parties must eschew violence and join the process of reconciliation and dialogue. There can be no peace in West Asia with an unstable and burning Iraq.

The issues thrown up by the nuclear programme of Iran must also be resolved by the international community through dialogue with Iran. I believe that while Iran must abide by its commitments to the IAEA, no useful purpose is going to be served by threatening and coercing Iran to

accept obligations beyond what they have already assumed under the NPT and the Additional Protocols. Any misadventure either on the part of Iran or any other power on this issue will create a completely unmanageable situation in this area.

A major threat to the security of this region emanates from non-state actors, in other words from global terrorism. The events of 9/11 destroyed the smugness with which some countries looked at this global phenomenon and thought that they were too far away to be touched by it. It is in this context that the developments in Afghanistan have a sinister implication for all of us. Countries which still extend support, moral, ethical, financial and logistical to the Taliban and the Al Qaida are doing a great disservice to humanity and must be disciplined. The threat of terrorism by air and sea and by weapons of mass destruction is too serious to be ignored by any country. It is only through concerted global action and understanding that we can rid humanity of this threat.

Having made the point, therefore, that India, as indeed, the other major Asian powers have a direct and abiding interest in the security of West Asia, I would like to now make some specific suggestions:

There should be a constant dialogue between Asian powers and the Gulf countries which are also an integral part of Asia. We could follow the pattern which has emerged in East Asia under the aegis of the Asian Regional Forum. The time has come to create a West Asia Regional Forum which could deliberate on issues which impinge on the security concerns of West Asia and suggest solutions, indeed participate in implementing the understanding reached in this Forum. A point which comes to mind immediately in this context is the security of the Gulf energy assets, both onshore and off shore, and of the maritime routes and sea lanes carrying energy supplies to Asian countries.

It may be because the Indian Ocean is named after our country, India has been called upon to shoulder the responsibilities for guarding the security of the sea lanes in the region of the Malacca Straits. The experience gathered by our vigilant navy could, perhaps, contribute to a regional effort from the Hormuz to the Malaccas

The traditional threats, posed by piracy and the smuggling of arms, drugs and human beings from which our nations have been suffering, have, by no means abated. On the contrary, the terrorists fired by misguided

ideology have forged deadly links of cooperation with the booty hunters. Shouldn't we, the victims, collaborate to ensure our own survival?

The Gulf region especially is linked with the rest of Asia on its east, especially Japan, South Korea, China and India through its energy exports, a major portion of which goes to these countries. A dialogue between Asian producers and importers of energy assumes crucial importance. This dialogue must go on.

The financial architecture governing trade and energy cooperation should be discussed at a separate Asian Forum. The role of the large reserves of foreign currency that the countries of Asia hold assumes great significance in this context. Free trade, an Asian Monetary Block, Asian Bonds and the creation of more Asian financial hubs are other issues which could be discussed in this Forum.

There is an old saying that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Close and constant cooperation among nation states today is the price of peace. In the globalised and fast shrinking world of today, no nation is an island unto itself. Cooperation, therefore, is not only desirable, it is unavoidable.